



To: Assembly Committee on Agriculture  
From: Nick George, Midwest Food Processors Association  
Date: May 14, 2009  
Re: Assembly Bill 229 – Home Canning

The Midwest Food Processors Association (MWFP) represents a variety of food processors in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois. The majority of our processor members are fruit and vegetable processors with 23 facilities in Wisconsin that process a large portion of the green beans, sweet corn, green peas, carrots and cucumbers consumed in the nation. The purpose of this memo is to comment on Assembly Bill 229 relating to home canning regulations.

We support the intent of AB 229 - to promote home canning production for small entrepreneurs by lessening the regulatory requirements for food processing. Home canning is a great way for people to learn more about the safe and nutritional value of processed fruits and vegetables. However with the commercial sale of home-canned foods, comes a great responsibility.

Food safety is the primary concern of all food processors. Selling a food product that is unsafe can lead to illness and even death. We support the fact that AB 229 applies to high-acid foods only since there is less chance of something going wrong with high-acid foods. We opposed a similar measure in Minnesota because it allowed home-canned low-acid food products into commerce without verifying proper training and food processing techniques. A botulism outbreak from home canned food products could kill people and damage an entire industry from a fearful public not differentiating home canned products from commercially canned products.

The regulations for lo- acid food products were developed using the best science available to prevent botulism in canned food. Through diligence and adherence to these standards, there has not been a botulism outbreak from commercially produced canned food products since at least the late 1960's. In Minnesota we were concerned that relaxing regulations for one segment of the food processing industry undermines the very reason they were developed, i.e., preventing public health problems.

The home canning guide book by USDA is designed for the home and home consumption. These guidelines are commendable, but do not provide the in depth hazard analysis and critical control needed to provide a consistently processed product in commerce. The Center for Disease Control confirms the real probabilities of unintentional mistakes resulting in botulism by citing home canning as the leading cause

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of food borne botulism outbreaks. CDC reports that about 110 cases of botulism occur each year and approximately 25% are food-borne. Outbreaks of food borne botulism involving two or more persons occur most years and are usually caused by eating contaminated home canned foods.

The amount of training required for food processors is significant in order to provide a safe product. Courses in Better Process Control are necessary for thermal processing. The University of Wisconsin Extension holds regular courses on Better Process Control for thermal processing that are well attended by all of our members. Our industry has developed hazard analysis and critical control point programs to ensure food safety for the public. We work closely with the USDA, FDA, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture and Consumer Protection, and many other food safety organizations to ensure that our food products are safe and that our employees are well trained.

We believe that AB 229 can promote the health and safety benefits of canned foods to the public and to the benefit of home canners and sellers. DATCP and the University of Wisconsin must be able to educate home-canners about the importance of food safety and the responsibilities associated with offering home-canned products to consumers.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment on AB 229. If you have any comments or concerns please contact me at 608-255-9946.